A talk with new members

From 1999 to 2000 – just one short year - the number of new members admitted to AIIC doubled (from roughly 75 to about 150), and since then the annual figure has remained substantially above 100. That means that some 700 colleagues have swelled the ranks of the association since the turn of the century. Communicate!, in collaboration with VEGA, decided to interview some of our newest members during assembly week. Here’s what we heard.

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Published: January 30, 2006 Last updated: December 2, 2015

We targeted colleagues who had become members in the last three years, but along the way we also found one candidate (application under consideration), one pre-candidate and one future pre-candidate. In all we received information and impressions from 18 colleagues. Most were in their early 30’s, but the ages ranged from late-20’s to mid-50’s.

A few were Brussels residents, some came from the neighbouring countries of France, Germany and the Netherlands, and others had travelled from more distant realms - eastern Europe, Canada, the USA and Turkey. Among them they covered eight different A languages.

As for participation in AIIC activities: 11 have attended regional meetings and 3 of them have even agreed to be part of their regional bureaux for the coming years; one will now sit on AIIC Council and another is already part of a professional delegation at an international organisation; two have attended Private Market Sector meetings and 2 have participated in VEGA activities; three have benefited from AIIC training seminars.

Years in profession before joining AIIC

More than half (9) became members within five years of starting their careers (four within but 3 years), while 4 took 6-8 years to join. On the other end of the spectrum, three of our interviewees had waited 16-19 years before joining.

How did they first hear of AIIC?

An overwhelming majority (14) first heard of AIIC while pursuing their studies, usually from their teachers. Three learned of the association from fellow interpreters, while one reported of hearing of AIIC from a fellow student who had a leaflet containing AIIC recommendations.

The most important things a professional association can do

Though views were expressed in various ways (and without prompting), we managed to group responses into categories. Most interviewees identified more than one area of activity as being of
importance. The figure in parenthesis is the number of times an area was mentioned.

- Establish/defend professional standards (ethics, working conditions, rights of interpreters) (10)
- Promote and safeguard the profession (9)
- Reach out to qualified non-members/serve as a forum to meet colleagues (4)
- Follow and adapt to changes (in profession and market) / offer training, especially in evolving areas (4)
- Be a mark of quality (3)
- Promote solidarity among members (2)

A few select comments we heard when asking about the role of a professional association:

“The most important thing is to define and defend our working conditions. Being a symbol of good quality is also very important.”

“Set professional, ethical and quality standards, and defend them.”

“Give guidance to new interpreters and to everybody else, interpreters and clients alike. Be a source of information about all aspects of the profession.”

“Organise, protect, promote itself and members… Also anticipate changes and elaborate possible scenarios.”

“I believe that any professional association should endeavour to make the profession known to potential recruiters and the public at large. More visibility contributes to defending working standards.”

**Where could AIIC improve?**

Many say they have not been members long enough to cite “dislikes” or areas in need of improvement. Two interviewees, however, mention image problems and say that AIIC could do more to make itself known. Another two say the association could do better in offering support to newcomers. Mention is also made of things moving too slowly and of a need to be open to innovation. One respondent says that some admissions criteria are still difficult to fulfil (e.g. sponsors with 5 years as members and who have worked with you in the last three). Another says that members should be more active in the association and show more solidarity.

Some selected quotes:

“We sometimes do not know (or do not want to know) that there are negative views about our association out there. We need to do more intensive PR work.”

“I’m too new to dislike anything yet. Ask me again in three years.”

“… A lot of Eastern European interpreters have never heard about AIIC. We should reach out more if possible. Take the Turkish example: we can convince people and AIIC is well worth it.”

“My answer may be due to coming from another continent. I think (AIIC) could benefit from being a little more open to innovation in some cases.”

“Lack of coherence between rules/principles and reality.”

**What do you like about AIIC?**

Many of our new members mention the very characteristics they consider to be central to the role of
a professional association (see above). Five state that they are pleased that AIIC promotes professional standards and thus quality. Another 5 cite the attraction of AIIC being a worldwide association. Three of the interviewees refer to the opportunity AIIC affords them to get together with colleagues. Two mention AIIC’s role in negotiating agreements with institutional employers. References were also made to the fact that AIIC membership is a stamp of professional recognition and that the association has shown the ability to change and become more open.

Some of the comments we heard:

“I like the diversity of our colleagues and that (AIIC) is a veritable international organisation.”

“(I like) the grouping of professionals to promote working conditions and quality.”

“AIIC is to me a platform where I can meet like-minded colleagues, like a large international family. I like the idea of there being a member of that family everywhere I might find myself in the world.”

“I like the way (AIIC) takes a stance to defend us. The private market also benefits from the negotiations with the institutions.”

“The ‘professionalism’. That AIIC exists all over the world (or almost), and that it is moving towards (being) a more open association with more space for a ‘non-elitist’ position.”

“(I like) the opportunity to be represented in major negotiations with international organisations. I know that I am not all alone out there.”

“I like that (AIIC) is very collegial. I like that it is very welcoming and able to give me a lot of what I need.”

Thanks go to Silvia Camilo and Ingrid Beauvez (AIIC pre-candidate) who did most of the actual interviewing and to the VEGA group in general for supporting my idea to seek the opinions of new members present in Brussels.

Recommended citation format: